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Review

THEIR FINEST HOUR

An anthology poignantly depicts battle and home front

Poremba, David Lee

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Kadzis, Peter *Blood: Stories of Life and Death from the Civil War*. Thunder's Mouth Press, 2000-05-01. \$16.95 ISBN 1560252596

An installment of the Adrenaline Series, edited by Clint Wallis, **Blood** brings together excerpts from fiction and nonfiction stories of the life and death struggle that was the Civil War. Of the 20 chapters that make up the anthology, four are selected from famous pieces (Michl Shaara's *The Killer Angels*, Stephen Crane's *Episode of War*, Sam Watkins's *Co. Aytch*, and Shelby Foote's *Shiloh*), three are by female writers, and the rest from letters, diaries, and memoirs. The excerpts are just about evenly split between the North and the South.

The anthology touches on nearly all aspects of the conflict. Pieces from *A Confederate Girl's Diary* and *The Diary of Caroline Seabury, 1854-1863* provides an accurate depiction of the home front on both sides. The African-American involvement in the War is reflected in Thomas Wentworth Higginson's well-known *Army Life in a Black Regiment* and the slavery issue in the lesser-known *Before Freedom, When I Can Just Remember* by Adeline Grey.

Peter Kadzis, an experienced professional journalist and editor, constructs the bulk of his book with action stories told by participants whose viewpoints cover the entire chain of command, from Berry Benson's *Civil War Book* to Ulysses S. Grant's *Memoirs and Selected Letters*. Each chapter is preceded by a short paragraph describing the writer and his role in the struggle, accurately placing the piece in the wider context of the War.

Each piece was selected for its intensity, describing a particular action or the writer's feelings toward the issues that embroiled him in the epic struggle. One of several examples is Abraham Lincoln's letter to James C. Conkling, written after the president's Emancipation Proclamation and just before the Gettysburg

Address, in which Lincoln expresses his war aims in a few brilliant pages. Another is Grant's description of the events surrounding Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House. Having written perhaps the best memoir of the conflict, Grant's graceful prose underscores the respect he had for his opponent and the importance of treating the affair with dignity.

Kadzis has taken the time to sort through the enormous amount of literature published about the War Between the States in order to present a one-volume work with the most vivid and poignant of those writings. There are perhaps no surprises among the selections for the well-read student of the War, yet they serve as reminders of its effect on people past and present. For the new recruits, **Blood** does its duty as a good starting point for the study of primary literature.

David Lee Poremba is a librarian/archivist at the Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library and the author of several pictorial works on City of Detroit history.